

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Fort Shaw Exchange FTTH-3 Rivers ROW Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	April 1, 2014
Proponent:	3 Rivers Communications
Location:	See list of tracts below
County:	Cascade County
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. is requesting to install an underground fiber optic cable to upgrade their facilities and services in the Fort Shaw exchange service area to include the communities of Fort Shaw, Simms, and Sun River. The proposed easement corridor will follow existing cable routes along county road ROW in Cascade County including the four State Trust Land tracts listed below. The cable will be buried 36"-42" deep through a temporary opening of ~6" wide through the following methods of plowing, trenching and directional boring, where appropriate, using a vibratory plow drawn by a crawler tractor among other equipment. The requested width of the easement is 20' wide through State Trust Land.

Township	Range	Section	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	Trust	County
21N	2W	36	NW4/NW4, SW4/NW4	1.2183	Common Schools	Cascade
20N	1W	13	NW4/NW4, SW4,NW4	1.2305	Common Schools	Cascade
19N	1W	11	NW4/SW4, SW4/NW4	0.7275	Pine Hills School	Cascade
20N	3W	36	NE4/NE4	0.3305	Common Schools	Cascade
Total CS				2.7793	Common Schools	
Total PH				0.7275	Pine Hills School	
Total				3.5068		

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc.-Proponent
 Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation- Surface Owner
 WIEGAND RANCH (RC Wiegand), Surface Lessee, Lease #1263 & #6622
 ROGSTAD, DAVID P & MARY R, Surface Lessee, Lease #9699
 NORRIS WILLIAM, Surface Lessee, Lease #5081
 BROKEN O LAND & LIVESTOCK LLC (Dan Freeman), Surface Lessee, Lease #9605

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of other agencies with jurisdiction. DNRC is not aware of other permits needed to complete this project. Since boring under waterways is the intended method to install the new cable near, under, or around water sources, no 310 permit is necessary.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)-Do not proceed to issue the easement as proposed to 3 Rivers Telephone Co-OP Inc.

Alternative B (Action Alternative)-Proceed to issue the easement as proposed to 3 Rivers Telephone CO-OP Inc. for the purpose of upgrading to fiber optic cable to serve the Fort Shaw exchange service area.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Soils present on the tracts involving the project site include: silty, clayey, draft silty, shallow clay and shallow to gravel. The topographic description of the project area involves county roads in gentle rolling terrain with coulees being present characteristic of the plains. These soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the underground fiber optic cable. Equipment will result in localized areas of soil compaction and soils will be disturbed where plowing, trenching, and boring occur. Reclamation efforts will require compacting and leveling of the plow scar resulting from the installation of the cable. Also, reclamation will require seeding of normally occurring and existing grass types utilizing seeding rates described in item # 7 below. Cumulative impacts to geology, soil quality, stability and moisture are not expected due to the minimal soil disturbance and due to the mitigations mentioned above.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Water sources are present in the project area. No impacts are expected due to the placement of the proposed cable occurring in fully constructed county road rights-of-way. Boring under existing water sources will result in no impacts to water quality, quantity, or distribution

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Cumulative impacts to air quality are not expected.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Vegetation will be minimally impacted as ~1.44 miles of underground fiber optic cable will be installed by vibratory plow. The vegetation consists of native species, introduced species, and agricultural land. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed cable corridor are a concern, however this concern will be mitigated by the proponent since 3 Rivers Telephone CO-Op Inc. is responsible for weed control within the project area. Cumulative impacts on the vegetation cover, quantity and quality are not expected due to the project occurring in a previously disturbed area combined with reclamation and reseeding to be completed by the proponent. The grass seed mixture for reseeding will consist of 35% Western Wheatgrass, 35% Slender Wheatgrass, 15% Bluebunch Wheatgrass, 10% Green Needlegrass, and 5% Lewis blue flax. If an agricultural seed drill is utilized 8#/acre is sufficient, however broadcast seeding requires the aforementioned rate be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through NRIS was completed for T21N, R2W. No plant species of concern or potential plant species of concern were noted.

A review of Natural Heritage data through NRIS was completed for T20N, R1W. No plant species of concern or potential plant species of concern were noted.

A review of Natural Heritage data through NRIS was completed for T19N, R1W. No plant species of concern or potential plant species of concern were noted.

A review of Natural Heritage data through NRIS was completed for T20N, R3W. One plant species of concern was noted. Northern Wildrye "Elymus Innovatus" is rare in Montana where it is known from a few scattered sites east of the Divide. Northern Wildrye habitat includes wetland, riparian areas specifically mesic openings and steambanks in low elevations. Global Rank: G5, State Rank: S2. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable. No potential plant species of concern were noted.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts provide habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (pheasant, sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Because construction will occur next to existing roads and the fiber optic cable will be buried, threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by proposed project.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T21N, R2W. There were two animal species of concern, three potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Fish-Brook Stickleback, Brassy Minnow, Northern Redbelly Dace, Northern Redbelly X Finescale Dace, and Burbot. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T20N, R1W. There were six animal species of concern, three potential species of concern, and one special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Chestnut-collared Longspur and Long-billed Curlew. Fish-Northern Redbelly Dace, Northern Redbelly X Finescale Dace Brook Stickleback, Burbot and Brassy Minnow. Reptiles-Greater Short-horned Lizard. These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T19N, R1W. There were three animal species of concern, three potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Ferruginous Hawk and Chestnut-collared Longspur, Reptiles- Greater Short-horned Lizard Fish-Brook Stickleback, Brassy Minnow and Burbot. These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T20N, R3W. There were three animal species of concern, two potential species of concern, and one special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds- Ferruginous Hawk and Bald Eagle, Reptiles- Greater Short-horned Lizard, Fish-Burbot and Brassy Minnow, Invertebrates-Mayfly (*Caenis youngi*). These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- A Class III intensity level cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the project area of potential effect. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified and no additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- Installation of the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the aesthetics of the land in any way as it will not be visible. It will lead to no erosion of the soil resources on the tracts as the line is located below the soil surface.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume limited resources in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

Previous easement did not require an EA. There are no other projects or plans being considered on these tracts listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The results of this project will not affect the industrial, commercial, agricultural activities or production in the area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- This project will not create any new jobs, as the project will be completed in-house by the proponent.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The proposed action will add to the tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- This small-scale project is being funded by 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed on the existing infrastructure in the area.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. DNRC is not aware of other management plans are for the area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- This proposed project area is next to existing county roads which generally have low recreational value. These tracts are legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational or wilderness activities on these state tracts.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Alternative A- No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts will occur

Alternative B- The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Alternative A- No Action Alternative- Not issuing the easement would result in no income to trust beneficiaries and would not provide the proponent the ability to upgrade 3 River's telecommunications facilities.

Alternative B- Action Alternative- Issuing the easement will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from each of the four easement applications for a total of \$50.00. The easement on the Common Schools trust land in Section 36, T21N, R2W will affect 1.2183 acres of grazing land X \$700.00 per acre totaling \$852.81 of revenue generated from the future easement. The easement on the Common Schools trust land in Section 13, T20N, R1W will affect 1.2305 acres of agricultural land X \$700.00 per acre totaling \$861.35 of revenue generated. The easement on the Common Schools trust land in Section 36, T20N, R3W will affect .3305 acres of grazing land X \$450.00 per acre totaling \$148.72 of revenue generated. The easement on the Pine Hills School trust land in Section 11, T19N, R1W R7W will affect .7275 acres X \$450.00 per acre totaling \$327.15 of revenue generated from the future easement. The total acres affected by the easements on Common School trust land are 2.7793 acres and the total revenue generated is \$1862.88 from the future easement. The total acres affected by the easements on Pine Hills School trust land are .7275 acres and the total revenue generated is \$327.15 from the future easement. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is used for agricultural and grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of agriculture or grazing among other possible, future uses on the tracts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne	Date: 2/3/2014
	Title: Helena Unit Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative "B" is selected. There are no significant impacts generated by granting the easement.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

None

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Gavin Anderson
	Title: Forest & Lands Program Manager, CLO
Signature: 	Date: 2/10/14